

SKETCHES FROM EASTERN HISTORY

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VIII.

BARHEBRÆUS.

IN the first half of the thirteenth century a great part of the population of Melatia, in the east of Asia Minor, close to the upper Euphrates, consisted of Jacobites, that is to say, Syrians of Monophysite creed.¹ These Syrians were numerous also in the adjacent districts, where they had a number of bishoprics and monasteries. Conspicuous amongst the latter was the great and wealthy monastery of St. Barsaumá, where the Jacobite patriarch often took up his abode, and where synods frequently met; its patron saint was held in high repute by the Moslems of the district also, who presented many gifts in gratitude for miraculous help. The Moslems of these parts seem to have been of Turkish speech; probably there was also an Armenian population. The land belonged to the kingdom of the Seljuks of Asia Minor (Rúm), but, lying on the marches, was much exposed to assaults, on the one hand, from the principalities of Syria and Mesopotamia; and, on the other, from the Christian Armenian State of Cilicia. It had also to suffer from the internal struggles that accompanied the decline of the Seljuk power. The Syrians in this quarter seem, however, to have enjoyed a fair degree of prosperity down to the time of the Mongols; several eminent Syrian prelates and authors came from Melatia, amongst them the subject of the following sketch. His father, a respected physician of the name of Ahrún

¹ They derived the name from Jacobus Baradaeus, who gave permanent form to the Monophysite Church of Syria in the sixth century.

(Aaron), seems to have been a baptized Jew. This is not inferred from his name, which was common enough among Syrian Christians, and besides would certainly have been changed at baptism, but from the fact that his celebrated son bore the surname of "Son of the Hebrew" (Bar Evráyá, or, according to another pronunciation, Bar Evróyó). From an epigram of his we see that the epithet was by no means agreeable to him, which confirms what has just been said. His Jewish origin is perhaps confirmed by the keen and sober intelligence which appears both in his actions and in his writings. His Christian name was John, but in ordinary life he was known as Abulfaraj, an Arabic name such as Christians living amongst Mohammedans were wont to bear. But in the following pages we shall throughout call him Barhebræus, the Latinised form of his surname, which has long been familiar to European scholars.

He was born in 1225-26. His mother-tongue was, it may be presumed, a vulgar dialect of Syriac; but it is certain that from an early age he was able to speak with fluency the literary Syriac, which had already disappeared from common use, but played a great part in the language of the Church and of learning. Of the youth of Barhebræus we have no details. He must certainly have received in Melatia such a training in learning as was then given to young Syrians destined for the higher service of the Church. But the statement sometimes made, that he also became acquainted with Greek and the ecclesiastical literature of that language, is certainly incorrect; his writings nowhere show any real acquaintance with either. By that time the Arabic language and literature had long superseded its rival with all Syrians who aimed at the higher education.

When the Mongols (Tartars) invaded the country in the summer of 1243, his father Aaron, in common with many others, wished to take refuge with his family in Syria, but

was hindered by an accident, and thus he and his escaped the fate of the fugitives, who fell into the hands of the Mongols. The Christians and Moslems of Melatia on that occasion, under the leadership of the Syrian metropolitan Dionysius, came under a solemn mutual obligation to stand by one another. This incident is in the highest degree surprising to one who knows something of the social conditions of the East. The professors of the two religions habitually regard one another as born foes; but here the terrible danger effected a union, and even a subordination of the proud Moslems under the downtrodden Christians, who were manifestly in the majority, and had for their leader a man of energy, though not over scrupulous. The Mongol chief allowed himself to be bought off, and no battle took place. Falling ill, he asked for a physician; Barhebræus's father was sent to him, and did not leave him until he had reached Kharput, after being cured of his malady.

Aaron and his family after this removed to Antioch, which was still in the hands of the Franks. Here his son became a monk, doubtless with a view to the episcopal dignity, the higher ecclesiastical charges being in the Oriental Churches accessible only to monks. Soon afterwards we find Barhebræus in Tripoli, also still in the hands of the Crusaders. Along with a companion¹ he here studied dialectic and medicine under a Nestorian. This may have had something to do with the tolerance which he afterwards showed towards Christians of different creed, though indeed it was not unusual for a Syrian to frequent the lectures of a man whose doctrine he regarded as heretical. Barhebræus probably had Moslem teachers also, for he could hardly otherwise have acquired his good knowledge of the Arabic language and literature. He wrote Arabic almost as fluently as Syriac, and not much more incorrectly than most Mohammedan

¹ See below, p. 246.

writers of his time. He could also make use of Persian books without difficulty, at least in his later years. He spoke Arabic well, of course; and presumably he had acquired a colloquial knowledge of Turkish also. But he seems never to have been brought into close relations with the Franks.

Talented and industrious, he must very soon have attracted the notice of the ecclesiastical authorities, and while still a youth of only twenty he was ordained by the Jacobite patriarch (12th September 1246) to be Bishop of Gubos, near Melatia, on which occasion he assumed the ecclesiastical name of Gregory. Not long afterwards he exchanged this bishopric for that of Lakabín, in the same region.¹

As bishop he took part in the synod held at the monastery of Barsaumá, after the death of Ignatius (14th June 1252), for the election of a new patriarch. At this juncture there arrived in the neighbourhood of Melatia a body of Mongols, a detachment of the great hordes which in those years made an end of the caliphate, and devastated on all hands with fire and sword. Barhebraeus's aged father, who had again returned to his home, fled with his little son Barsaumá from the village of Margá to a rocky region beside the Euphrates, and remained there in hiding for six weeks, until the barbarians had gone. The world was trembling in its courses, but this made little impression on the Jacobite dignitaries; they went on intriguing and quarrelling just as usual. Dionysius of Melatia, who has been already mentioned, and John, surnamed Barmadeni, the maphrián or primate of the eastward dioceses,² a man of high repute as a scholar, were competitors for the patriarchate. By the laws of that Church no valid election could take place without the presence of the maphrián; but Dionysius procured his own

¹ I am not sure of the exact pronunciation either of Gubos or of Lakabín.

² See below, p. 244.

election in September 1252 in defiance of this rule, and in a very thinly attended synod. The youthful Barhebræus was sent into Mesopotamia to convey to John the apologies of the synod, and to beg his concurrence. But John had meantime gone to Aleppo, where, on 4th December of the same year, he got himself chosen to the patriarchate,—an election which certainly has a greater apparent claim to validity than the other. But the all-important question was as to which patriarch the Moslem rulers would recognise. There began accordingly a scandalous competition between the rivals (not a rare occurrence in the Eastern Churches). On both sides the effort was made to gain over princes and potentates, as well as individual bishops and other ecclesiastics of influence, by money or fair words. Along with his nephew, a monk, Barhebræus was sent into the mountains of Túr Abdín, in northern Mesopotamia, which were mostly inhabited by Jacobites, to collect funds in the monasteries and villages for gaining over to Dionysius the local prince, to whom John had promised a sum of money for recognition, but had as yet failed to pay it. The mission was successful. It is well worth noticing, though not very edifying, to see how coolly Barhebræus, certainly one of the most respectable persons of his class, relates these transactions. It must be remembered that the laity, from whom the money was drawn, were for the most part exceedingly poor; bright prospects of a reward in heaven¹ were, to be sure, held out to them by way of compensation, and all the proceedings

¹ In a little Syriac treatise, which, gross forgery though it is, seems to have been popular, God says: "To every believer who gives of the earnings of his hand to the holy Church, I make it good in this world, and repay him thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold in the world to come, and write his name in the book of life;" and again: "Honour God's priests, who sacrifice the living lamb, so that ye may find mercy in the world to come. He who despises them shall fall under my wrath, for my priests are the salt of the earth." The Jews, who contribute handsomely to their synagogues, are cited as patterns for Christians.

were carried on in the most approved Christian phraseology. The Eastern Churches were, of course, unable to secure immunity from the caprice and violence of the Moslem authorities without a skilful use of the mammon of unrighteousness, but it is a very different matter when the faithful are taxed that one of their own spiritual heads may be able to secure an effectual triumph over another. Occurrences of the kind have not been wholly unknown in the West, but the abuse attained far larger proportions in the East.

Dionysius now proceeded to Damascus, where he was honourably received by the governor, Barhebræus acting as interpreter. In these negotiations, however, Dionysius fell into a stupid blunder, exhibiting the letter of a Mongol magnate which had been intended for his supporters in Melatia. This caused great offence, for the Tartars were regarded as mortal enemies by the Moslems. It was only with great trouble, and through the intervention of Ibn Amîd (Elmacinus), the well-known Coptic author, that Dionysius at last succeeded in obtaining his diploma of confirmation on payment of a large bribe.

Barhebræus was soon afterwards named by Dionysius to be bishop of Aleppo; but on the installation there of a partisan of John's, he withdrew, along with his father, to the Barsaumâ monastery, where his patriarch was. John betook himself to the Armenian king of Sîs, while Dionysius received recognition almost everywhere. Barhebræus soon again took up his abode in Aleppo. When the Mongols, who in the meantime had taken Bagdad (January 1258), entered Syria he wished to go to meet them, plainly with the object of securing mild treatment for the Christians. The idea was not unreasonable, for their common antipathy to Islam readily predisposed the Mongol chiefs in favour of the Christians, who, moreover, sought only toleration, and did not fight for sovereignty like the Moslems. Some

of those wild Tartars had, moreover, been baptized, for the Nestorians had successful missions among the Turkish tribes. Dokuz Khatun herself, a wife of the sovereign Hulagu, who formerly had been one of the wives of his father Tuli, and who in accordance with Mongol custom had passed with the rest of the inheritance to the son, was a Christian, and did much for the protection and advantage of her co-religionists. But the attempt in this instance was unsuccessful. Barhebræus was detained at Kalat-Nejm, one of the Euphrates ferries; and Hulagu meanwhile coming to Aleppo, occupied the town, and inflicted on Moslems and Christians alike all the horrors of a sack (January 1260).

Dionysius compromised himself seriously. That he obtained letters of confirmation from the Mongol sovereign (1259) was not amiss, especially as the Seljuks and the Armenian Christian king had equally acknowledged the Tartar as their overlord. But it was a scandal that he connived at the robberies of the Christian subjects of the St. Barsaumá monastery, who had broken loose from all restraint in this period of general corruption and dissoluteness. And he finally lost the last shred of reputation by procuring the assassination of a cousin who had been a great trouble to him, and of his cousin's brother, only a few days after a reconciliation had taken place; even the *chronique scandaleuse* of the history of the Jacobites supplied no parallel to such conduct. To escape the consequences of his deed the patriarch again went to Hulagu, and after overcoming many obstacles was lucky enough to secure his special protection, so that he was able to lord it more tyrannically than ever. And now the monastery of St. Barsaumá witnessed an unheard-of scene; the murderous patriarch was assassinated before the altar as he was holding a night service (17th-18th February) by a monk, a

deacon, and a layman, nephew of one of the abbats. The assassins threw the "disciple" of the patriarch, who had been his instrument in the murder of his cousin, down the rock.

Whether Barhebræus had before these occurrences openly broken with Dionysius is not known; but one of his poems shows that latterly he was no longer at one with him, and some verses upon his death indicate that he regarded his assassination as a righteous judgment.

A Mongolian commissioner, himself a Christian, made his appearance for the punishment of the perpetrators of the deed. One of the abbats, who tacitly, at least, had approved it, was cruelly chastised and driven half-dead from the monastery. He was replaced by a brother of the priest and physician Simeon, who had risen to great favour with Hulagu, had grown very wealthy, and stood out as the main support of the Jacobites, in return for which he exercised influence in extraordinary ways in Church affairs. Some of the murderers and their accomplices were executed, and others committed suicide in prison.

By this shocking occurrence John became sole patriarch, and met with universal recognition; but he remained in Cilicia. Barhebræus now stood on good terms with him; and when he died in the spring of 1263, the bishop of Aleppo wrote in his honour a long poem commemorating his many excellences.

Abbat Theodore now hastened to the court, or rather to the camp, of the Mongolian sovereign to seek the patriarchate for himself. But Simeon the physician declined to undertake his cause, and also persuaded Barhebræus, who was also at that time at court, certainly not by mere chance, to oppose his claims. Barhebræus then proceeded to Cilicia and took part at Sis in the election of abbat Joshua, who, as patriarch, assumed the name of Ignatius (6th January 1264). Forthwith they proceeded to fill up

also the office of maphrián, or primate of the Jacobites of the East, which had been vacant since June 1258. The origin of this dignity may be here explained. The Persian sovereigns had gradually suffered the Christians of various denominations in their empire to constitute themselves into distinct bodies, insisting, however, that while the head of each was to be independent of every external authority, he was to be in entire subjection to the throne.¹ These heads bore the title of "Catholicus." The Syrian Monophysites did not receive a fixed constitution under a catholicus until a comparatively late date (in the sixth century); they stood in much closer connection with the Christians of the hostile empire of Rome than the Nestorians did, and, on the other hand, were much less able to compel recognition than the sometimes very warlike Monophysites of insubordinate Armenia. The main seat of the Jacobites of the Persian empire was the considerable town of Tagrit, on the middle course of the Tigris; but nowhere in Persia were they nearly so numerous as the Nestorians. The Jacobite catholicus bore also the title of maphrián (mafri-yáná), *i.e.* "the fructifier," who spreads the Church by instituting priests and bishops. After the Arabs had become masters of all the countries in which Monophysite Syrians were found, the separation of the provinces of the Jacobite "patriarch of Antioch" and that of the maphrián was, strictly speaking, no longer necessary; but the force of custom, and still more the interest which many of the clergy had in not allowing so influential and remunerative

¹ The Christians of the Sásanian empire originally had bishops only, without any single head. Even after they had placed themselves under the catholicus of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, the Church of Persia proper, for some time, continued to maintain its independence. The statement that the patriarchal authority of Antioch had been delegated from the earliest times to the bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon is, of course, a mere fiction, resting upon the later conception of the unity of the Church in its outward organisation.

a post as that of maphrián to go down, were enough to maintain the old arrangement. But many disputes arose as to the boundaries of the two provinces, and the whole relation of maphrián to patriarch; on the whole, however, it was agreed that the patriarch's indeed was the higher rank, but that the maphrián in his sphere was quite independent of him; and further, that for the election of a patriarch the co-operation of the maphrián was indispensable (unless that post also was vacant), and that a maphrián could only be nominated with the sanction of the patriarch. In the choice of a maphrián the wishes of the Eastern dioceses (*i.e.* of the bishops and heads of monasteries there) had to be respected; yet, as a rule, he was taken from the West. Now Barhebræus had already been designated as maphrián by the late patriarch, and, moreover, he seems to have been the ruling spirit in the electoral synod; accordingly he was chosen "maphrián of Tagrit and the East" on Sunday, 20th January 1264. The Armenian king with his suite and officials, spiritual and secular, were present at his consecration on the same day in the church of the Theotokos at Sís. Barhebræus preached the sermon, which an interpreter translated into Armenian. The Armenians, be it noted in passing, were of the same creed as the Jacobites, but differed from them on many points of ritual, and perhaps also in some subordinate matters of dogma. Armenians and Jacobites were thus very ready to suspect one another of heresy, and at best there was little love lost between the two parties.¹ After patriarch and maphrián had received their diplomas of confirmation from the Mongol sovereign (whose assent had doubtless been secured before the election) they withdrew, the one to Asia Minor and the other to Mosul.

The Jacobites of the East had long been without any

¹ The relations of the Jacobites with the Monophysite Copts were better.

proper government; for the predecessor of Barhebræus, his old fellow-student at Tripoli, had failed to establish his authority in the East, and soon withdrew into Syria, and after his death the vacancy had continued for nearly six years. The lands of the 'Tigris were terribly wasted. Although the Mongols still were more favourable to the Christians than to the Moslems, they were neither willing nor able to spare them in those wholesale massacres which constantly occurred. Moreover, the position of the Christians, which was one of greater friendliness with the Mongols, and thus gave them a somewhat more self-reliant bearing, repeatedly excited the jealousy and fanaticism of the Mohammedan population, which was greatly superior in numbers and in strength; in the district of Mosul, in particular, many bloody encounters took place. Matters were better in Aderbiján (north-western Media), the favourite seat of the Mongolian rulers. There, until the reaction set in, the Christians suffered little molestation, and monasteries and churches arose in the capital cities of Merághá and Tabríz. The Jacobites were here less numerous than either Armenians or Nestorians. Barhebræus now laboured indefatigably as maphrián for the strengthening of his Church. He made many extensive journeys within his territory, took measures for the erection of ecclesiastical edifices, and consecrated numerous priests and bishops. He succeeded in maintaining good relations with the Mongolian court without coming into too close contact with it. And with all this he studied, wrote, and taught without intermission.

At Mosul the maphrián was met in solemn procession by the officials of the Mohammedan prince as well as by the Christians: the vassal of the Mongols had good reason for treating in a friendly way a man of mark who had just been the recipient of their favour. Still more solemn

was the reception of Barhebræus when, at Easter 1265, he came to Bagdad—still an important place, notwithstanding its recent terrible sack. Such was the consideration enjoyed by Barhebræus, that even the catholicus of the Nestorians sent a deputation, including two of his own nephews, to escort him into his presence. A harmony like this, between the representatives of two creeds which had been separated by the hostility of eight centuries, is well worth remarking. Many Nestorians took part also in the service held by Barhebræus, at which was wrought the customary miracle of a spontaneous overflow of the chrism at the moment of consecration.¹ The catholicus, indeed, presently became jealous of his colleague's popularity, but no mischief followed, for he died a fortnight after the festival (Saturday, 18th April 1265). After spending the entire summer in Bagdad, and consecrating numerous clergy of various grades, Barhebræus returned again to the district of Mosul, where his proper see was. He usually lived in the great fortified monastery of St. Matthew, which was for the maphrián something like what that of Barsaumá was for the patriarch.

The patriarch Ignatius, in the years immediately following, fell into a violent dispute with the physician Simeon, already mentioned, who had taken possession of the government of the monastery of Barsaumá. As he had done this on the strength of orders issued by the Mongols, Ignatius sought to obtain from these a decision in an opposite sense; and although Barhebræus earnestly urged him to come to some amicable settlement of the difficulty, and not to expose himself before "the barbarian Huns," he persevered in the line he had chosen. The maphrián naturally took this very ill. When, accordingly, in 1268,

¹ This miracle recalls that of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples, and no doubt admits of a similar natural explanation.

in the course of a journey westward to visit his relatives near Lake Van, he encountered the patriarch on his way to the Mongol court to complain of Simeon, he sought to avoid a meeting, and the patriarch obtained one at last only with difficulty. Abaga, who had succeeded his father Hulagu in the sovereignty of the Mongols in February 1265, actually promulgated a decree in accordance with the wishes of Ignatius; but the influential Simeon contrived that it should straightway be cancelled by another, and Barhebræus, detained in Cilicia by a serious illness, saw Simeon return in triumph with the decree in his hand. But the dispute was further prolonged. The Government pronounced alternately for this party and for that; neither reconciliation nor compromise proved permanent. At last, in 1273, Barhebræus, who had been called in as arbiter, was successful in composing the difference. On this occasion he found his native land in poor case. Moslem troops from Syria had invaded the Mongol territory, wasting it far and wide, and dragging many Christian women and children into slavery. The lords of Egypt and the petty princes of Syria were at that time at continual war with the Tartars, whom in the end they succeeded in shaking off; but the struggles in the meantime had completed the ruin of many districts. Additional insecurity was caused by the presence of robber tribes, which now could do pretty much as they pleased. Barhebræus, who had taken up temporary quarters in the monastery of St. Sergius, was escorted thence to that of St. Barsaumá by a body of fifty armed dependants.

In Easter of 1277, Barhebræus was again in Bagdad, where some years before a large new Jacobite church had been built in the neighbourhood of the former palaces of the Caliphs, mainly at the expense of a rich Christian official named Safíaddaula. At this period, when the

Christians for a short time were able to raise their heads under the rule of the religiously indifferent, not to say stolid barbarians, frequent instances are met with in which wealthy private individuals devoted money to building churches. The smaller contributions of the poorer members of the community — doubtless the main source of income for the higher clergy — were forthcoming, we may be sure, in unusual abundance during the term of a maphrián so respected as Barhebræus. He was again received with great pomp by the Christians of Bagdad. The catholicus of that time also, Denhá by name, sent a deputation to meet him, and received him immediately afterwards with honour. Jacobites and Nestorians, at such a juncture at least, felt themselves to be branches of a common stem.

In autumn of the same year Barhebræus came to Tagrít, which, although nominally the see of the maphrián, had beheld no incumbent of that office for sixty years. The Christian population of the place, to be sure, had been sadly diminished; for immediately after the fall of Bagdad the Mongols had put to death the Christians of Tagrít (whom they had at first spared) in their usual wholesale manner, for having concealed much property of the Moslems instead of giving it up to the conquerors (Palm Sunday, 1258). Barhebræus remained here in his nominal residence for two months. The following years he spent partly in the neighbourhood of Mosul and partly in Aderbiján.

It is characteristic of the time that, in 1281, the Nestorians, on the death of their patriarch Denhá, chose as his successor a clergyman deficient in ecclesiastical learning, whose recommendation was that he belonged to a nationality of Central Asia which was also largely represented at the Mongol court. This was Marcus, an

Uigur, or Turk of the farthest East, who had come from China on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but on account of the insecurity of the roads from war and robbers had been unable to complete the last comparatively short portion of the journey. As patriarch he bore the name Yavalláhá, and he distinguished himself alike by his honesty and by his knowledge of the world. He showed great friendliness to the Jacobites; but as he knew little of the old dogmatic controversies, and even in the simplicity of his heart sought relations with the pope, he is hardly entitled to so much credit for liberality of spirit as Barhebræus is, who was well versed in the dogmatic questions which divided the Christians of those countries, but, in marked contrast to the old champions of his Church, sought to minimise their importance. He expressly declared that the one thing needful was not love to Nestorius or to Jacobus (Baradaeus), but to Christ, appealing to the words of the apostle: "Who is Paul? and who is Apollos?" (1 Cor. iii. 5). Isolated instances of similar irenical tendencies are met with elsewhere in the East during the crusading period.

Barhebræus, in the spring of 1282, wished to go to Tabriz, and, accordingly, owing to the insecurity of the roads through the Kurdish country, attached himself to the caravan of a Mongol princess. News now coming of the death of Abaga, he proceeded to Alatag (also in Aderbiján), where, according to the provisions of Jenghiz Khan's fundamental law, the new sovereign was to be chosen by the Mongolian assembly. Here he paid homage to Abaga's brother Ahmed, who ascended the throne on 21st June. He obtained also a diploma of confirmation. Ahmed, as his Arabic name testifies, had accepted Islam, and is reported to have ruled his conduct expressly with a view to the caliphate; but he was by no means fanatical, and he even renewed to the Christian monasteries, churches,

and priesthood their privilege of exemption from taxation. And the pagan Argun, Abaga's son, who overthrew Ahmed in July 1284 and caused him to be put to death, was again exceptionally gracious to the Christians. The Mongols had already, indeed, begun by this time to go over in troops to Islam, which was better suited to their character than even the crudest type of Christianity; but Barhebræus did not live long enough to see all the hopes which the Christians of the East¹ had built upon these brutal barbarians completely falsified, and Islam once more restored to undivided ascendancy in the wasted lands.

In the autumn of 1282, Barhebræus received in Tabriz a letter, in which the patriarch told him of his serious illness, and besought him to come and relieve him of the cares of his office; this was clearly intended to convey the wish that Barhebræus should be his successor. Winter being at hand, and the roads dangerous, the maphrián, however, did not comply with this invitation. Ignatius died of dropsy on Tuesday, 17th November, and the party of Simeon hastened to elect bishop Philoxenus to the patriarchate (2nd February 1283). The election was held in the Barsaumá monastery, and only three bishops, all belonging to depopulated dioceses in the neighbourhood, took part in it. But confirmation was obtained without delay from Alatag. Humble apologies were now tendered to the maphrián for the uncanonical procedure, and he was entreated to give it his after-concurrence, without which the election could not hope for the approval of a majority of the bishops; but he turned the messengers away. Even when Simeon the physician came in person, he continued steadfast. It was not until the son of Simeon, a pupil of his own, with whom he was on personally friendly terms,

¹ Similar expectations were sometimes cherished in the West also.

had a meeting with him (August 1284) that he condescended to accept the offered presents and to sanction the appointment. We can well believe the assurance he then gave that he was far from wishing to be himself made patriarch, the secure and influential post he actually held being worth more to him than the headship of the Jacobite Church in the West, which had been entirely desolated by war; hard as the times were, he was better off than his predecessors. But he had to maintain the maphrián's dignity, and his self-esteem also had been undoubtedly hurt, for he was well entitled to consider himself the foremost of the Jacobite clergy. The meeting referred to took place as Barhebræus was once again travelling in the caravan of a princess from Tabríz to the district of Mosul.

Near the village of Bartellé, not far from the monastery of St. Matthew, he had built to the martyr "John the carpenter's son" a new church, which he caused to be decorated by an artist from Constantinople, one of two painters whom the widow of Abaga, a natural daughter of the Greek emperor Michael, had fetched from the imperial city to adorn the church of her own denomination (the Greek "Orthodox") in Tabríz. But the old church had been searched in vain for the relics of the martyr. After every one else had failed it was given to the maphrián, as he himself tells us, to discover the marble sarcophagus, in consequence of a vision for which he had prepared himself by prayer and fasting (23rd November 1284). How far self-deception entered into this, we can hardly say. Barhebræus was a cool-headed person, but like all his contemporaries he had sucked in belief in miracles and wonders with his mother's milk; on the other hand, we shall hardly be doing an injustice even to the best representative of the Oriental clergy of that day if we deem him not incapable of a little pious fraud.

In 1285–86,¹ Barhebræus, as we learn from one of his verses, was led by astrological calculations to expect his end; a presentiment which proved true. His brother Barsaumá, who was constantly beside him, and took charge of his building undertakings, sought to withdraw him as far as possible from danger by inducing him to quit the neighbourhood of Mosul, which was now yearly harassed by marauding bands from Syria, and to return to Merághá. Here he continued to labour for a while; but on the night of 29th–30th July 1286 he died after a short illness of three days. He had previously expressed his regret for having left his proper place from fear of the death that was inevitable. It may be supposed that he had felt some warnings of weakness, although his brother declares him to have been at the time in exceptionally good health.

There were then in Merághá only four Jacobite priests to conduct the funeral obsequies. But the Nestorian patriarch Yavalláhá, who happened to be also in the place, enjoined a day of strict mourning on all those in his obedience, and sent the bishops who were with him to the funeral. The Armenian and even the Greek clergy also took part in it; there were altogether about two hundred mourners, and for once the Christians showed a united front in face of the Moslems to do honour to a person so distinguished. With solemnities which lasted over nine hours, Barhebræus was buried at the spot where he had been wont to pray and administer the sacrament; but at a later date his body was removed to the monastery of St. Matthew, where his grave is still shown.

We do not need to make very great deductions from the high praise lavished on the character of Barhebræus by Barsaumá, his brother and successor. Had he not been amiable and humane, he would hardly have stood in such

¹ The Syrian Julian year begins with 1st October.

pleasant relations with those of other Christian communions. And yet he was no weakling, but a thoroughly forceful man, not without ambition; and in point of character, with all his imperfections, he certainly stood far above the large majority of the higher clergy of the East.

His great activity is attested by his ecclesiastical buildings, already begun when he was bishop of Aleppo, and by his literary works. From his twentieth year down to his last hour, his brother tells us, he studied and wrote without intermission. Barsaumá's list, which is not quite exhaustive, enumerates thirty-one writings of Barhebræus, among which are several works of some compass. They are mostly in Syriac, but some in Arabic. Manuscripts of most of them can be found in European libraries, and sometimes there are more copies than one—a sign that they were much read. His books embrace almost all branches of the knowledge of his day. It would indeed be idle to expect much original thought or independent research in such a mediæval and Eastern scholar. His principal object was to make accessible to the Syrians the productions of Arabian and older science. Most of his encyclopædic and separate scientific works are for the most part, accordingly, merely intelligent compilations or excerpts from earlier treatises in Syriac or Arabic. Some are simply translations; thus he rendered some works of the famous Aristotelian Avicenna from Arabic into Syriac. Barhebræus wrote on philosophy, medicine, astronomy and astrology, geography, history, jurisprudence, grammar, and so on; among the subjects treated, the secular sciences are on the whole more prominent than theology proper. He even compiled two little books of anecdotes. He earned the respect of learned Moslems by his writings, and no doubt also by his skill in oral teaching and disputation. An odd proof of this is the foolish rumour that Barhebræus on his death-

bed had turned Moslem; the thought was the expression of the wish to gain for Islam and eternal blessedness so distinguished a scholar.

Some works of Barhebræus are still of great value, particularly his *Sacred and Profane History*, drawn from older Arabic, Syriac, and Persian works, and especially from the Syriac Church History of Michael, his fellow-townsmen of Melatia, who was Jacobite patriarch from 1166 to 1199.¹ It is distinguished by an apt selection of materials, contains much that is not to be found elsewhere, and is an important authority for the author's own period. In his very last days Barhebræus wrote at Merághá, at the request of some Moslems, an Arabic edition of the *Profane History*, which is shorter than the Syriac work, but contains some new matter. Next in importance to the *History* is his larger Syriac *Grammar*, in which he tries to combine the method not very happily borrowed by the older Syrians from the Greek grammarians with the Arabian system. Viewed in the light of modern philology the book shows great defects, but it is far ahead of the works that preceded it, and still very instructive. Further, his *Scholia to the Bible*, which are more philological than theological, are of value (especially for the history of the Syriac text); and so is his collection of Jacobite Canon Law.

Barhebræus wrote metrical pieces also. He has certainly none of the gifts of the heaven-born poet. These compositions have neither fancy nor passion. He writes them with his understanding, partly after the pattern of older Syrians, partly on Arabian and Persian models. The didactic wordiness of the Syrian poetry is often also apparent. But the skill and elegance with which he

¹ A work hitherto known only by an abridged and interpolated Armenian translation. The original has been recently discovered, but is not yet accessible.

handles the unpromising materials of the ecclesiastical language is worthy of recognition, and he shows spirit and taste, especially in the short epigrammatic poems. He is further entitled to the credit of being almost entirely free from the verbal conceits which were so greatly affected in the poetry of that time. Generally speaking, he can fairly be put on a level with the average Arabic poets of his age, and certainly above most of the Syriac. Altogether he was one of the most eminent men of his Church and nation.